**Leather Protocols**

**(…..or What to expect at a Leather Event)**

These are a few things you may want to know when attending a “Leather” event. In my mind these apply broadly in most situation, Leather or not, but I was asked to put this together for those of you who will be attending a Leather event for the first time. Like everything in the lifestyle if you ask 10 people this question you will likely get 12 answers. This is my personal view on things, and what I would expect from members of my House. If you simply remember the number one rule, “Don’t be a dick!” you will be fine! Relax and enjoy.

*(Note: This is a modified set of protocols that was originally set out by Brother Jerry in 2001, now deceased, and has been widely used as a base point for discussion over the years.* *I have modified and updated them for our House purposes and application.)*

**No touching without permission (this means people or objects that don’t belong to you)**

· Believe it or not, this is something that is relatively recent in the past few decades, but has been widely accepted across the country. Master/Dom(me)/Daddy etc., as well as slave/boy/girl/pet. No one has the right to touch another without expressed permission. This also applies to tools/toys.

· **In the case of a collared submissive/slave/pet it is considered polite to ask permission from his/her Master/Owner/“D” type, rather than just the “s” type if you know who that is.**

· It is considered very disrespectful to touch the collar of anyone not belonging to you without permission!

· Note: Standing permissions are certainly possible, and quite common, just don’t assume or go beyond permissions given. (Just because you may have been given standing permission to hug, doesn’t mean you have standing permission to grab their ass, or pull their beard.)

**Formal and informal introductions**

· No one can assume a person’s status by looks alone, so it is considered appropriate to begin a conversation with everyone in an open and respectful manner. If the person is under ownership or control of another, and it is not obvious (no collar visible) it is their responsibility to let you know.

· If it is obvious who is who, in a more formal setting, it is a loose rule to greet the “D” type first. This rarely applies in a more relaxed setting.

· If you are introducing someone to another person it is very helpful for all concerned to do so by including information or title. For example: “Master Ben, this is Master Cecil who owns the Woodshed in Orlando”, or “Master Ben, this is my slave neill, and my girl beth.”

**Addressing a person by a title**

· There are two schools of thought when it comes to titles. The first is that titles are reserved for specific relationships, such as “Master” to his slave, “Daddy” to his boy/girl, “Sir/Ma’am” to their sub, etc. The second is that honorifics are used out of respect, not out of obligation. Here is what I have found to be most common **within the Leather communities with whom I have engaged**:

· When making introductions titles are commonly used and used with the full scene name. (Example: Master Varii, not just “Master” or “Varii”)

· When a Dominant is talking to another “D” type they don’t know well, often full scene names are used including honorific. Much like in a vanilla environment when a more formal address of Mr. / Ms / or Dr. is used rather than the more casual first name.

· When a Dominant is talking to another “D” type they DO know well, most prefer you drop the title or honorific even if they are senior to you, or are your mentor. There are times however, close “D” types will call the other “sir”, or “ma’am”. This is done as a “tip of the hat” and a sign of respect in that moment for some reason, or as an acknowledgement of the other’s seniority. This is not something demanded or expected, but I guarantee you it is felt and appreciated. (Example: As close as Ben and I are, most of the time I simply call him Ben, but on occasion you may hear me say “Thank you sir”, and you will hear other Dominants or Masters refer to me as ma’am.)

· When a “D” type is speaking with an “s” type or switch they know, they generally address them informally.

· An “s” type commonly refers to a “D” type they don’t know well by their full scene name including the honorific. (Example: Hello Lady Catherine) Again this is much like in a vanilla environment where Mr. / Ms. / or Dr. is used. You don’t normally go to your Orthopedist and say “hi John” unless they are your neighbor or friend.

· When an “s” type knows a “D” type well, it becomes a matter of the D types preference, or the preference of the “s” types Dominant. If the “s” type, and their Dominant, like and respect the “D” type in question, it is common for the “s” type to refer to them as “sir” or “ma’am” (but not usually by any other honorific alone… example: not just “Master”, “Daddy”, “Mistress”, etc…. those are usually reserved for those collared to them and often designate a specific type of relationship.) This is my protocol and preference for those collared to, or in service to, me.

· Once introduced most “s” types, and switches, refer to each other very informally.

**Protocols of dress**

*Flagging*

The term flagging in the Leather Community refers to how you wear a particular item of clothing.

· In general, articles of clothing worn on the left hand side of a person’s body gives the impression that you are a Dominant, Top, or the Aggressor (in Primal settings).

· If items are worn on the right hand side of the body you are stating you are a submissive, or bottom in a relationship or scene.

· Switches often flag both left and right.

· The articles of clothing used to make these “flagging” statements are often, but not limited to, arm bands, gauntlets, wrist bands, and hankies.

**Hankies and the Hanky Code**

Hankies come in a WIDE variety of colors, and each color and shade signifies a particular interest or fetish within the Leather Community. People who are “flagging colors” are often stating they are looking for play in that area **at that time** or later that night. (Example: If I’m in a dungeon sporting a black hanky on my left side, it is a statement that I’m in the mood, and available for a heavy S/m scene.) If you aren’t familiar with the “Hanky Code” and what specific colors mean, please look them up!!

· Always remember, that just because someone appears to be flagging a particular color hankie, or article of clothing on a particular side, does NOT necessarily mean they are into what you think. Some people wear leather because they like it, not because they are part of the leather culture. For some, what they wear and how they wear it has little significance past a fashion statement, so it is always best to clarify a person’s interest and not make any assumptions as to a particular meaning. **When you are in a Leather environment however, please be aware of the significance and what you are communicating**.

**Equipment**

· Often particular pieces of equipment can be attached to a person (but not necessarily worn). Such items include, but not limited to, floggers, whips, restraints, handcuffs, etc. As with articles of clothing, if worn on the left it usually means you are a Top or Dominant and would like to utilize the equipment on someone; if on the right, it gives the impression you are a bottom or submissive and would like the equipment to be used on you. Equipment is personal property and should never be grabbed, or used without permission.

**Collars and chains**

· Leather or chain collars are very symbolic within the Leather Community. It is usually an identification of a D/s or M/s relationship. Sometimes it is more specific by the addition of a closed padlock without a key. Often these articles are worn so that they must be put on and taken off by the one who possesses the key. As with all protocol this is a generality, because in this day and age, there are many who wear collars or chains as an accessory or even as a piece of fetish wear. So always query someone if you really want to know. Within the Leather community it is considered very rude to touch another person’s collar without the consent of the owner.

**Leather Vests**

· Leather Vests are very common within the Leather Community. Often you will see pins as well as colorful patches or information on them.

· Most often, the back of a vest is reserved for two distinct purposes:

1. The identification of an individual’s association to a particular organization, House, or Family. This patch is known as their colors (as in a “parade of colors”). It is considered Leather Courtesy to greet someone wearing colors from out of town, or from a House, Family, or Organization you are familiar with and respect. We strive to be open and friendly to our fellow tribesmen who may wander into our neck of the woods.

2. The identification of a person who may be holding, or held, a particular Leather title from a contest or an honorary designation.

· The front of a vest is often covered with pins. Usually the left side of a vest is reserved for affiliation with specific Organizations, House, Family, or People to whom you have a special connection. **They are worn on the left side to show their connection to the person’s heart.**

· The right side is often reserved for event pins, or other pins you deem worthy of putting on your vest.

· Vests with Club, House, or Family “colors”/patches are to be worn only by the members. Allowing another to wear your “colors” is considered very bad etiquette, and in some organizations is a violation sufficient to be stripped of those “colors”.

**Friendship Pins**

· Pins which are given to an individual, usually by a person affiliated with a club/event/or title holder. These pins (they are different from a regular House or Organization pin) symbolize that a member of a club/organization felt that you merited the honor of wearing their clubs’ friendship pin. Occasionally Leather title holders will raise money for their travel fund, and those who donate to that fund are given a friendship pin as a thank you for supporting them. One tradition (less common than it used to be) of presenting a Friendship Pin has the giver placing the pin on the front of the receiver’s jeans, on the fly. After that day/evening, the pin is then moved to the vest.

· Receiving a pin is usually considered an honor, therefore it is improper etiquette to ask for a friendship pin. It is an item that is always given as an act of friendship and respect.

**What follows are some additional points of basic etiquette when at a leather bar or event:**

· Respect each others opinions. This does not mean you have to agree with it, but offer the respect that in turn should be afforded to you.

· Never wear articles of leather with tennis shoes.

· Generally don’t mix brown and black leather items.

· A Dominant who has their submissive with them doesn’t usually carry a “bag” or “purse”, their boy/girl does that (known as a boy/girl bag).

· Don’t touch a Master’s cover unless you are their submissive or have been asked to do so.

· Use masculine or feminine pronouns as preferred by the individual you are addressing. When in doubt it is OK, and polite, to ask their preference.

· Always negotiate in an honest manner before entering a scene with someone.

· Disclosure of any illnesses is important for the safety of all.

· The terms Safe Sane and Consensual are often utilized within the Leather Community. Safe and Sane is defined by the open and honest dialogue between two (or more) consenting adults who come to a common agreement to engage in a scene. It may not be viewed as safe or sane to others, but these consenting agreements are between individuals, and in general, are not the business of outsiders to the agreement. At this time PRICK (Personal Responsibility In Consensual Kink) and RACK (Risk Aware Consensual Kink) are very prevalent along with SSC. This emphasizes the personal responsibility of both sides to speak up and honestly negotiate.

· Do not interrupt a scene! Be extremely respectful of scene space and of your noise levels in Leather space. Frequently these scenes are more intense energetically (often with significant primal and sexual intensity) than in a non-leather or mixed dungeon space.

· Bootblacking is often a scene, and can be a strong energy exchange; therefore don’t interrupt it or be rude by conversing with either the bootblack, or the person in their chair, unless you are 100% sure it is OK. Don’t treat it as a simple shoe shine. Usually bootblacks are giving their time and talent to raise money for a cause; therefore a donation of $20 is generally a good rule of thumb.

· Bootblacks shine more than boots. They often do other articles of clothing as well. Other items should be discussed ahead of time (negotiated either as a scene or as a service).

· By accepting or taking a position in the Leather Community you are holding yourself and others up to a higher standard of mutual Respect, Honor, Loyalty, and Honesty. These are values that should be practices in all communities, but expected within the Brotherhood of the Leather Tribe.

· Most members of the Leather Community are more than willing to share their knowledge with those they believe are serious about learning. They are usually very willing to teach, train, or answer questions in areas where they possess a particular skill or talent, thus helping a newcomer on his/her journey.

Lastly, I ran across these notes someone posted from a class taught by Hardy Haberman. I’m afraid I don’t know where the class was taught or when, but I liked the content, so thought I would include them for you.

Hugs,

Master Varii

*House of Valor 2019*

**Notes from Hardy Haberman Class on Old Guard/New Guard and Leather Traditions (found online):**

Haberman noted that many of leather’s traditions and protocols came from military life, and later from gay motorcycle clubs, but he also noted that there is no one fixed set of Old Guard protocols written on a scroll somewhere. Haberman also made the point that every leather generation thinks of itself as New Guard and the generation before as Old Guard: **“All of us have an Old Guard. It’s whoever taught us.”**

Many of the Old Guard protocols Haberman grew up with are hardly revolutionary. “If you get the Miss Manners book and look at etiquette, you have Old Guard traditions and protocols, with the exception of a few kinks thrown in. It’s not rocket science.”

Haberman then offered his thoughts on a few leather community values.

*Honor:* “Honor is being true to yourself, being true to your community, being authentic. A person who’s not honorable is not authentic, right? So—how much honor is there in Sir Grand Dom of the Universe on [Fetlife.com](http://Fetlife.com) who has 25 cyberslaves but has never shown his face in public?”

*Integrity:* “It means doing what you say, and keeping your word.”

*Community:* “Community means that you show up, you help out, you become active. You can participate by showing up, but you can participate even better by getting involved.”

*Authenticity:* “Authenticity is one of the values that I think was Old Guard when I came into the community, and still works today. Create a protocol and a lifestyle that works for you. Live into it. Because someday you’re going to pass that knowledge on, and you’re going to be somebody else’s Old Guard. You’re going to be an example. As leather people, we’re an example for the leather people that come after us. The way we behave, the way we treat each other, the way we play, is going to get passed down.”